

Eldridge: -knew all of this. This was like they were acting out certain things and then stepping back and analyzing and all this stuff and all these people were just being manipulative.

Curvin: [inaudible 00:00:13] a longtime friend but important chronicler of Newark events for the *Newark Evening News* back during the '60s and early '70s before the *Newark Evening News* closed its doors. Doug covered all of the civil rights organizations and the civil rights activists from a period about beginning in the early '60s right through 1972.

Doug, let's start by just talking a little bit about how you got to Newark and got to the *Newark Evening News*.

Eldridge: Okay. Well, I had gone to Columbia in New York and I finished in June '57. I came to Newark for a summer job just to work for the summer at the news. I had expected to go on to graduate school after that. It was just going to be fill in for three months or so. I came over and real twist, I had a fellowship that required me to be single, stay single. I couldn't get married while I had this fellowship to do graduate.

Well, they had a lot of fellowship strange things in those days. I got married. I got married in June of '57 when I started working at the Newark News. I forfeited this fellowship. I could have gone someplace else but Marge was working in New York. I just decided to try to stay at the news and they had an opening and it happened to be on a night shift.

In September '57, I began as a regular full-time reporter and I stayed on the staff in one way or another for 15 years then until 1972 when the paper closed. Although, in the last year, I was actually working for the union within, for the labor union. My last reporting for the Newark News was in '71. I was there and because I worked nights, I was sent out to cover a lot of community meetings and activities. A lot of that revolved into the civil rights movement in the '60s.

Curvin: How did they ultimately or at some point decide that there was a beat that you were assigned to?

Eldridge: Well, there was so much going on. I think that it seemed to need more and more coverage. I stayed on nights until the middle of the '60s, actually. That meant I still had to cover the police station on Saturday nights and things like that. It was not a total involvement until the mid-60s. Then they moved me to the day shift.

There was just a mounting crescendo of activities and because people would meet at night, that's when they could do a lot of these things. I'd go to one thing and another and it just seemed to develop. I don't recall there was ever a time when they said, "All right, now you're going to be the civil rights reporter or anything like that."

It just seemed to be like a natural evolution. There certainly was no beat there when I came but I got up and just by going to all of these night meetings, whatever it was, a social act organization, some political things, I got to know a lot of people and one thing led to another.

I was pretty, pretty much full-time on that. In the later '60s, it evolved further and I spent a lot of time on the anti-poverty programs and things like that. That took a tremendous amount of time. United Community Corporation, all of those conflicts and activities and everything. Then I got involved in the 1970 election. I covered part of the '66 election for mayor when, of course, Gibson lost to Addonizio. Then in '70, again.

Curvin: Let's go back to the late '50s because you said there was this crescendo of activity. I'd be interested in hearing you describe how you think the level of activity, the tone of activity changed during that period from the late '50s to the early '60s. I assume that you observe and wrote about the activities of the various organizations at that time.

Eldridge: Some of them, yes. Whilst there didn't seem to be quite so much activity in the late '50s. Let's say we were talking now this was Carlin was the mayor then and there did seem to be more issues coming out. It'd be hard putting out to remember in what sequence they came up but there-- and, of course, things were happening elsewhere around the country and that was reflected in city ends and the demonstrations and people were-- and it was easy for people in the work to be supportive of all of that down there.

I'm trying to think of what were some of the early ones. There was the-- I remember the Behringer High School demonstrations.

Curvin: Let's talk about that for a while because I too have noted that I think that was a turning point in Newark.

Eldridge: Yes. Well, it was certainly, it was a real confrontation, particularly with the buildings, the unions, the craft unions, and there were the demonstrations. I think there were arrests. I didn't actually, because I was working nights, I wasn't out there and the demonstration were daytime things. I certainly became quickly aware of them. I know it was core and I don't know who else, there must have been some other--

Curvin: The Newark coordinating [inaudible 00:06:29] was in effect at that time.

Eldridge: Oh, and George Richardson. Yes.

Curvin: Then there were a number of people there from ADA. [inaudible 00:06:39]

Eldridge: Oh, yes. Derek was the most radical ADA, [inaudible 00:06:44]. [laughs] Yes. There was still a liberal coalition with some of the African American groups. Of course, there were others who were there and had the presence in the community like the NAACP but they weren't out there on things much. No.

This was a whole new thing for Newark and they were very entrenched. These unions were very powerful and very protective of all that nepotism and everything they'd done through the years. Then I also remember and I think it was maybe almost about the same time, there were demonstrations of White Castle on Elizabeth Avenue.

I think it was about jobs. They wouldn't even hire black people then. Was it a White Castle? It's difficult to imagine that now. It was a series of things. remember Heinz was targeted at one point. I don't know if there were demonstrations with that or not. Then there were recurrent police issues and again, some of the sequence I don't but I know there were incidents with the police including a fatal shooting. That may have been a little later.

Curvin: How would you describe the various organizational roles during that period? Just take the NAACP, for example. Generally, how do you measure their role in this period?

Eldridge: Well, it was hard. I wasn't really in that community. I was an outsider. As a reporter; I'd go to events and things. NAACP had a long history in Newark. I think it's one of the earliest chapters as I recall when they celebrated one of their anniversaries. That was amazing. They were back in '99 or something like that when they started here. They'd been here, they had the freedom fun dinners and they'd give awards to each other like a lot of organizations but they didn't seem to have much involvement in issues or protests or anything.

It wasn't their style. Somewhat like some of the churches, which also had long histories and everything and they'd go down and meet with the mayor but they weren't on the edge. They probably were resentful, although I can't cite sources. They were probably resentful of some of the newer younger groups that came in. Who were they? We've been here all these years and we've been carrying the torch.

Curvin: To try to keep this about [unintelligible 00:09:43]. I think it would be fair to say that they had a different vision than the newer groups. That their vision was to get into government to find the opportunity to establish the first magistrate, the first principle, and so on. While they did in fact very actively criticize core at times over the newer groups. In retrospect, I think it's fair to give them credit they worked on a different front in a way.

Eldridge: I remember talking with Jim Pauley of the Urban League which was even more conservative in some ways. He would talk about how core would go out and confront the employers. Then the employers would panic and where could they go? Urban League just happened to have some files, personnel files that they could present and say, "Well, if you need clerks, you need, whatever, we are going to--" but there was a one, two thing, good cop, bad cop approach.

Curvin: I must tell you that I can recall some instances where we in core would demonstrate against the corporation and the corporation would say, "What do we do? How do we do this?" We would say, "Call the Urban League."

Eldridge: Maybe sitting by the phone.

Curvin: In one particular case Jim Pauley called me up and he said, "Bob, what have you done to these people? They don't want to buy us through furniture." They have all these ideas that they want to help us with.

Eldridge: That was good. You had better results with the urbanly because you weren't threatening them. You weren't a rival for them.

Curvin: Not at all. In fact, for all of the groups, I think on some level we saw all of us as working in tandem. Everyone had a very different role. It didn't often look that way because there was internal conflict within the movement just as there was nationally.

Eldridge: Of course, the NAACP did have this whole national history and they could cite all that was going on elsewhere around the country but locally, as you say, they were probably content with very small successes in some of individual jobs and things like that.

Curvin: Now you do recall though Newark's first African American elected official?

Eldridge: Irvine Turner. Yes, I do. Although I wasn't here when he was elected.

Curvin: What do you remember about him?

Eldridge: I speak only good. [laugh] He was quite a character and he may have already gone somewhat past his peak by the time I got into things. He was elected, as I recall when the new charter took effect in 1954. He defeated some other people who might have had quite a different role but Turner won.

He had a rather checkered reputation, as I recall. He had a lot of different small businesses if you will and activities operations. People would tell me and I shouldn't repeat on but tell me that he had a paper. I forget. What it was, it called The Guardian or something like that. I don't even recall seeing it but he had this little weekly paper and he would get police reports and offer to keep people's names out of the paper.

If they would he give him a little contribution or I don't know whether that's true or not but it seemed to fit in his care. He had a rooming house there on high street. He seemed to be almost he was somewhat flamboyant. It was discovered at one time that wife and children lived in east Orange on Oregon Parkway, as I recall. He said, "They had the respiratory problems and they had that the air in the city was too difficult for them or something. He had no shame about making any kinds of claims. Of course, he played race card a lot. Since he was the only one, he was almost unavoidable in a way.

He was the only one until 1966 when Calvin West went on to council. Of course, Calvin wasn't going to make any trouble with Turner. Turner was an institution. He certainly did some positive things. I know particularly about the monument for the first black soldier to die in World War II was killed at the Pearl Harbor.

Turner campaign to get a monument to him down in the Douglas Harrison, how he did monument now has recently moved down to Military Park but he did those things. He did things. Everything he did wasn't self-serving but I don't know. I never could deal much with him. I didn't deal with him. I didn't see him as very relevant in some ways. He was just there.

Curvin: He was often very outspoken and critical of the new groups, like Four.

Eldridge: Oh yes. He was resentful.

Curvin: Very resentful.

Eldridge: He was entrenched and there was no one else even came close. I don't recall that he was even challenged much within his ward through the years in the elections there may have been, people ran against him but he had pretty-- He and the Yula's ward who was the central ward, democratic chairman, and Jenny Leman. There were other people who some of them had other little jobs with the city or the county but Turner was there. I couldn't relate to that. [laughs] In some ways I was never too sure or so. I didn't have to really.

He was very much old, an old-style guy, though. I don't even recall what happened to him. I know he was indicted along with a lot of other folks in the late '60s. I don't recall whether he even ran for the last election or not. His health got poor. His health failed and he was not-- Seemed to me, he wasn't fully functional in some ways in his last year.

Curvin: Last few years,

Eldridge: Last few years, he was somewhat like him and Ralph Villani continued their service on the council. They weren't quite sure how much they were there but he certainly made his mark. He's got one of the longest streets in New York.

Curvin: Named after him.

Eldridge: In retrospect, I guess maybe he comes out more, more positive of the negative, but there was so much self-interest in what he did. I got the impression, maybe he was more of a firebrand in his earlier days but that's, before I got here. I don't know how he got to even be the Councilman in the first place. What is that? He dabbled the newspapers, real estate other stuff. I guess, yes.

Curvin: If you go back to that history of the charter reform that possible for, to be elected. One of the ironies is that he opposed a charter reform and ran very actually campaign very hard along with the more entrenched forces that did not want to see the government change. The people who actually supported the charter change from the Black community had their own candidate, who I believe in fact was Roger Yancy who became a judge.

Eldridge: The other one became a judge too, that wasn't he a candidate?

Curvin: Hazelwood.

Eldridge: Hazelwood, Harry Hazelwood.

Curvin: Yancy-

Eldridge: Roger Yancy.

Curvin: -if I remember correctly, was the councilmanic candidate-

Eldridge: Oh, was he in the second ward?

Curvin: -after the charter change and ran against Turner. Turner was able to create much more of a working-class broad-based movement very much supported by many of the more leftist union types.

Eldridge: Oh, really?

Curvin: The Yancy group was considered like the elite.

Eldridge: They were.

Curvin: They were smashed.

Eldridge: Lace curtain

[crosstalk]

Turner was a street fighter and he knew his way around.

Curvin: Oh yes, really. Pretty tough.

Eldridge: I can't say I had a whole lot of dealings with him. No, ever. When I had to do a story-seeking reactions to major developments, of course, I'd have to include him. He was the Councilman there's no getting around him. I think I just recently reread the story I wrote after Dr. King was assassinated and I talked to people and of course, I talked to Turner. He had a few good things to say at that point. By and large, he didn't seem to be really-- He wasn't in the forefront of anything.

He wasn't moving anything. Anyway, no Turner wrote, and then, of course, Calvin came along and Calvin was at that somewhat similar in some ways but traded on his sister's role and the initial administration. Calvin and he was quick to tell people this, he worked at the Newark news before he was elected. He tells people, he was a reporter, which he was not he was what in those days they would call a copy boy. Dropped that because the boy term was seen as demeaning. He work nights, and he would compile lists of the stories that were going in the next day's paper. He compiled an inside list for the content of the paper. There were questions about whether they should even let him continue working at the paper while he is running for council, because he would see everything that was going in the next day's paper. [laughs] That's a candidate.

Finally, he left then. We've had a cordial relationship through the years, but he clearly was not going to make any trouble for anybody when he got into office. He served only the single term, as I recall. I think he lost, but he was seen totally as it is just [unintelligible 00:20:43]. We've had a cordial relationship through the years. He was not going to make any trouble for anybody when he got into office.

He served only the single term, as I recall. I think he lost, but he was seen totally as it is just [unintelligible 00:21:01]. Maybe a second, one of [unintelligible 00:21:06] people on the council. There wasn't any real political progress that seemed for the African American community until 1970.

Curvin: I know this is a little touchy, because I was the Core agitator of the time, but can you share some of your reflections about Core? Do you remember some of the early-- Well, you mentioned some of the early campaign.

Eldridge: Well, I remember Barringer, I guess, you were involved with Barringer.

Curvin: Barringer.

Eldridge: Barringer. White Castle. I don't know whether that was yours or not.

Curvin: Yes, that was [unintelligible 00:21:46] true.

Eldridge: Oh, I'm trying to think of some of the others. It was Haynes. Haynes was an issue, and the police issues, especially the police issues.

Curvin: Especially the police issue.

Eldridge: Oh yes. I remember Dominick Spina, the police director one night. I called him for comment, and he said, "You in that damn [unintelligible 00:22:03]." Or something like-- [laughs] He had it in for you. He didn't hesitate to tell [unintelligible 00:22:11], try to drop stuff on me about your personal life and everything.

"Oh," I said, "Wait a minute. I'm not sure I want to hear this." Which led me to believe that somebody listening in, on my phone. I had indications of that, couldn't prove anything. Something was going on, but yes, you were demonized by the establishment.

Curvin: It was quite an honor at that time. At least we felt so.

Eldridge: Well, Core was different, because you were mostly young. It certainly was a much more mixed group, you didn't have many old people, [unintelligible 00:23:01] say that I know. It was mostly young people for starting careers and everything. I remember you were [unintelligible 00:23:10] Rutgers, what did you do? You went to social work. Social work school. Yes, I remember.

It just seemed as though people in Core, I could talk to, they were doing things, they could talk about what they talked about, what they were doing. They made themselves felt in the city. Of course, you had Core, had quite a national organization and reputation at that point, with James Farmer and all. I remember you and the people who followed you, Ray Proctor and Fred Means, and Jimmy Hooper, I don't recall a sequence there, but they're different people, and--

Curvin: Stevens. Walter Stevens.

Eldridge: Walter Stevens. Yes. I remember Walter too. He was a little quieter. Then there were some Whites there, the [unintelligible 00:24:00], they were twins, weren't they twins? There were some other Whites involved with it. There was a--

Curvin: [unintelligible 00:24:07] was a very

[crosstalk]

Eldridge: Wasn't he involved with--

Curvin: Marty Gallanter.

Eldridge: Marty Gallanter. Yes. Whose father was a lawyer and real estate guy.

Curvin: Well, that was his uncle.

Eldridge: Oh, well, there was a cop, Gallanter, too. There was a detective Gallanter who was related to them. Core just seemed to be me-to-me. That's where the action was, and where things were happening. I guess, because of my age, maybe I could relate more readily to Core, that I could to NAACP, which tended to be older and less talkative in some ways, and less issue-oriented maybe.

No, I remember Core when you had the office up on West Market Street, and you reminded me the Newark Coordinating Council, which was a bunch of organizations, but Core was very much, I don't think the NAA was, was it? No. Core was ADA, which was a curious situation. There were some others, I don't recall what the other others were. There were some churches, some churches.

Curvin: Some churches.

Eldridge: Some churches. A few Colliers Church, and a few of the others.

Curvin: Reverend Tucker was--

Eldridge: Oh, Homer Tucker. Yes, yes, yes. From Mount Zion, and Earl Huff, somewhat later, although he was not nearly as-- I was never as impressed with him as I was with Collier, but then Collier had so many other things going. Some of them had-- They were wanted to be bishops or whatever, they-- [laughs] No. Core was where it was for a couple of years, even though your numbers weren't great. Others resented, you're doing this, but--

Curvin: Do I remember correctly that you actually joined or rode on our bus to Washington for the [unintelligible 00:26:13] on Washington?

Eldridge: No, I did not. No, not that I recall. I think I took the train.

Curvin: You took the train?

Eldridge: I believe. [unintelligible 00:26:18] with king in '63.

Curvin: I see.

Eldridge: I believe I took the train. I wrote about it, during and after I wrote about it. I know I was at the station, the NAACP, I think had chartered a car or two on the train. They filled a lot of shoots on the thing. Of course, everybody was in-- I don't recall being with Core on a particular thing. The paper might have raised a question. If I'd gone on your bus--

Curvin: You've had a conversation for some reason, we might have thought about it, because you were interested

[crosstalk]

Eldridge: I can't clearly recall how I got down there and back. I do know I was there. [laughs] I wish that I was.

Curvin: Well, I'm sure that you're correct.

Eldridge: No, no. I don't know. It's just that, that was of course a very thrilling thing for me, and because what I was doing, I was covering all this local activity, and then I may not have been the only reporter they sent either. I think there was another one went to, and of course, they had a couple of guys working in Washington too, as reporters, and they probably got in on it, but I do remember.

I remember that very vividly, and of course, all of these things help stir local feelings too, or what's happening in Newark, all this movement all over the country, and people from Newark, who were going South for Selma. I didn't go to any of those, **[unintelligible 00:27:58]** the March, Montgomery to Selma. Then the news did send a reporter on that.

I remember Earl Harris calling me from Selma. "I'm down here on the **[unintelligible 00:28:07]**." **[unintelligible 00:28:08]** had to let you know what he was doing.

Curvin: **[unintelligible 00:28:12]** one of the story. The paper.

Eldridge: Oh yes. Oh, sure. Well, he got it. Well, he called me when they shot up his store too during the riots, but there was a--

Yes, the only other thing I got to cover, which was outside Newark, on the civil rights side was the desegregation of-- Oh my God, isn't it terrible with the memory? In Clemson with Harvey Gant, who later became mayor, a mayor in the South, he became **[unintelligible 00:28:47]**, and he was the first Black student to go to Clemson, which was in the Western South Carolina.

Curvin: **[inaudible 00:28:53]** dispatch there

[crosstalk]

Eldridge: I was sent there by the news, but actually, they sent me to do another story too, over at one of the army bases down there about something else. They combined the things and I did go up to Clemson and met Gant and talk to the students. It was first time I'd ever been in the deep South, and that was a revelation too, but there was no--

I don't think there was any Newark involvement there. No, there wasn't, because Gant was on his own pretty much, and there was all these other white students, most of them from the area. Then later on, I did get to go to events and things in Washington involving the poverty program.

[unintelligible 00:29:37] went down, they'd have conferences, Sergeant Schreiber, Hubbert Humphrey, people like that would be there. Interesting. One of the reactions of the Newark news to the 1967 Riots was to send me to the National Conference of the Urban League. In all my career, I'd never been to the Urban Leagues National Conference, and they did cited as a result of the riots. This was one of their **[laughs]** awakening. They sent me to Portland, Oregon to attend the 1967 or 1968 conference of the National Urban League. Most of what I did was local was and very little was outside Newark, too. There were other reporters covering what was going on and Elizabeth or Bergen county, that thing.

Curvin: Let's talk about the poverty program for a while. What difference in your mind did the poverty program make in the city, both in terms of addressing the basic issues of poverty race disenchantment? Also, what impact did it have on the political relationships that existed in the city?

Eldridge: In some ways that's the most important impact that it had was that it created almost alternative to city hall which hadn't really existed in any formal way. Organizations were established, the United Community Corporation and its neighborhood area boards, which became avenues, training grounds, if you will, for a lot of people.

When I look back at the lists of the people who were involved in those groups. Then where they all went to become mayors, city council members, public officials in many ways.

Before that there was nothing, and I know how it was resented so much at city hall. In those days I was talking also fairly frequently that Don [unintelligible 00:31:48], who was Mar [unintelligible 00:31:49] spokesman and thinker. They saw it as a rival.

This was the first real organized competition for them, for the error entrenched interest. Of course, this whole idea of maximum feasible participation of the poor, which was a great catchphrase from the economic opportunity act and how that was to be implemented and the fights that ensued for control of the UCC and some of the area boards.

When the Agenesia people would try to push forward certain people that they wanted in those positions and back and forth, and whether they could work with this one or that one, and some of the area boards of course came under different controls. There were a couple that were pretty much completely controlled by city hall.

Then of course there was the rivalry over certain programs. The city had control of the Neighborhood Youth Corps. The preschool council was up for grabs. It was mostly over with the UCC. Then there were some other programs like legal services and so on, which were not completely under the UCC umbrella.

Then the UCC had the Community Action Program and that was jobs and that was money. Every area board had all of these community organizers and they said, there was a tremendous patronage thing. Suddenly there was another source of patronage besides the [unintelligible 00:33:14] Administration.

It was tremendous. I don't know-how, or where some of the later leaders would've learned, what they needed to know. I remember Sharp James and the [unintelligible 00:33:32] whatever it was called. Each one had its own name. That was a different, that was a neighborhood, an old neighborhood. It was the area board, and you had the Donald Tucker with the Ironbound, operation Ironbound down on Merchant Street.

[unintelligible 00:33:48], he had the base in Pennington Court. You had any number of other people some of whom are still around, still with us. I don't know how

it played out in other cities. I know the [unintelligible 00:34:01] people were very upset about this whole thing and they resented it, and they felt that the Washington was in effect coming in and was subsidizing a whole rival group.

The [unintelligible 00:34:22] people. Of course, they had their side of it too. Those were very heady days. I remember some of the clashes and the battles over who was going to head these things. Of course, at first, it was Willard Heckle, dean of Rutgers Law School, who was seen as above reproach. He tried to walk the tight rope.

Then you had Timothy still, who was certainly more tied in with city hall, but he was authentic in his way ability. He did. He did. It was easy to discount him as you did, did that at your apparel.

Then there were others who were more, oh, Levin West and people that I think were more self-promoting, if you will. The poverty program had a tremendous impact and in a way. I'm sorry, it didn't last. We got Vietnam and we got this other things to divert attention. Then when the money wasn't there much more, then the interest-- there weren't any more, the jobs were disappearing. Then when they wanted 70, a lot of people, they went down to city hall, then they didn't have to stay out in the area.

Curvin: I'm sure you recall that the program really in a sense was significantly tapered down.

Eldridge: Oh, yes.

Curvin: Because of the reasons that you pointed.

Eldridge: The war.

Curvin: The mayors.

Eldridge: The mayor, too.

Curvin: The war certainly had an effect, but the mayors across the country in big cities.

Eldridge: Oh, they got the Schreiber, finally.

Curvin: They got the Congress, actually, and to the head of-

[crosstalk]

Eldridge: You had, as you may recall, call them the gold twins or whatever a Frank [unintelligible 00:36:17] and Lee Bernstein, who may-- went on this holy war against the poverty program. They wanted to expose it. They were always firing off all charges and things about how the funds were being used.

The program was in a lot of turmoil and some of it was not helped, I guess, by the way, some of it, maybe the staff people be behaved. To this day, there's arguments about what role some of them may have played in '67 and who was using what

mimeograph machine. That may never be, so it was seen as a radical force in the city.

Curvin: Oh, this is a good opportunity to also maybe reflect a little bit on the role of income, the north community. Union project and the SDSs, the Students for a Democratic Society. Young people who came into the city.

Eldridge: I remember

Curvin: Again can you say a little bit about how you saw their role in the body.

Eldridge: They came on without a whole lot of advanced announcement of course, but they came in initially at the invitation, as I recall, the Clinton Hill Neighborhood Council, which was had been formed and was still inspired in some ways, although not by Stanley winters whom we know, and was a longtime Clinton Hill activist.

There were some other people, and they thought these students were going to come in and help organize the neighborhood and I guess, enlist new members for Clinton Hill neighborhood things. They were for quite an awakening. I first became aware of them when our editor called me one day and said there's a Tom Hayden on the phone here wants to talk to you. I said, who? And I've never heard of him then had no idea who he was or what he was about.

He got on the phone and he talks to me like, he'd known me forever. I to who were you? And he told me that they were going to have a demonstration. Now, I don't recall which demonstration it was, but they had several demonstrations. They demonstrated against some of the merchants on Clinton Hill. They had a big demonstration in, as I recall, outside Kline's Department Store in downtown Newark where it was, they had-- I remember the flyers.

Our neighbor was beat bloody at Kline's and I'll never forget. This was a new level of rhetoric, much rougher stuff than I was used to. They would have these things. They called me to go up and inspect a rat. In fact, they said, I didn't see the rats. It was a decrepit apartment on Clinton Avenue. To show me the conditions where, and I went up there and it was pretty bad and they were, they were demonstrating against a ratio stack, as I recall, was the owner each for the building. The guy who lived in the apartment was Jesse Allen.

Things began to fall into place. They live for publicity and they almost wanted to know about all these things that were going on. I didn't know what to make of them. Wasn't sure how they were being accepted in the community, of course, or really what it was all about, but they did certainly create a lot of commotion and I think they part company then with the Clinton Hill, the Clinton Hill sponsors to some extent. They lived in a couple of tenements down there all in the Clinton Hill section.

They were somewhat out of place although they would not go into the forefront too much. If there were meetings or stuff, they would have somebody from the community usually would go up and make the presentation, will be Jessie Allen or Bessie Smith or some of the other people from the-- **[unintelligible 00:40:24]**, did you mention her? I think she was into **[unintelligible 00:40:26]**. There was a lot of

controversy about who they were, and what they wanted. Lee Bernstein, of course, immediately realized that was a threat.

[sound cut]

Controversy about who they were, what they wanted. Lee Bernstein, of course, immediately realized that was a threat to his and his territory so he went all out against them. They never seem fully to fit in, in some ways and then I became aware that they were writing about what they were doing, some of them were.

Hayden and a couple of others and there was a publication called Studies on the Left. It was dodgy. He came out of the University of Michigan, as I recall it, and the SDS had been born Ann Harbor. These people were coming into Newark, and stirring up all this, and then they were analyzing it, stepping back and analyzing it and telling the radical movement around the nation what was going on here. They saw Newark almost as a laboratory, as a testing ground. They certainly had an impact--

Curvin: In what ways do you think they've had an impact?

Eldridge: Well, they did draw more attention to some of the local grievance and local issues. They were very good at the publicity and, of course, I got sucked into that, too. You know we were being used to some extent. Maybe they just think just galvanized some things but whether it would have happened without them, that's hypothetical. I don't know. I don't--

Curvin: "We wouldn't galvanized" you mean **[unintelligible 00:42:18]**

[crosstalk]

Eldridge: Well, there was this competition, just as Core may have encouraged the NAACP to stiffen up a little. I think when **[unintelligible 00:42:26]**, "Who are these kids? What are they doing? Are they work in our territory?" I know, I've talked so much to Stanley Winters and some other people about that. They seem to attract some following. They did gain control, as I recall, of the area board in that neighborhood.

They made a huge battle out of that thing to gain control of that thing. They named it for-- that they created the Bessie Smith Community Center. They were a presence there, there was no ignoring them. I don't know if they had any lasting effect. Of course, they've been blamed or credited, if you will, for some of the unrest that came. I don't know if they've had any effect.

Curvin: You've mentioned how Spina, police director equalized **[unintelligible 00:43:19]** [crosstalk] but to some extent, their reaction to-

Eldridge: SDS?

Curvin: -SDS was pretty much the same or maybe even more.

Eldridge: Well, I think so. Those were still the days when you could cry communist or things like that and radical. They were out there and they had ideas about turning

society upside down or inside out or something. Very mixed motives. These kids were not poor kids, the ones who came to Newark by in large, they were from Midland.

Hayden's father was an editor of a newspaper in Detroit, as I recall. They wanted to do this here and then some other cities, they went out, I think they did something in Cleveland too, I don't know exactly but they were-- When, I've realized that they were documenting this and that they were in effect playing roles here, I was very suspicious, I was wary about them.

I wrote one article about them after long hemming and hawing. I went one long article about them, and it was not very sympathetic and they were very distressed about that. I just felt that they were wrong. There was more to it than met the eye. They were not just young purely idealistic people. Yes, police, they made the plea, and Bernstein got apoplectic about it, she did a lot of things.

The Clinton Hill, the people who got badly bruised, scarred were people like Stanley Winters and others who had been trying through the years to build an interracial neighborhood movement of fighting urban renewal or trying to get improvements and everything. All of a sudden, they are upstage, they're shoved aside. I think they may have taken control of whatever was left of the Clinton Hill Neighborhood Council at that time.

Curvin: Do you have any sense of why they left after 1967? Or most of them left [unintelligible 00:45:33]?

Eldridge: Race was probably a factor. These were white kids that are almost entirely Black neighborhood. They stood out more and they were painted rightly or wrongly as being instigators of all that had happened. It was maybe some thought that they had somehow helped fuel the explosion and they were pretty partly [unintelligible 00:46:03].

I don't know what their program could have been after that. I don't even recall how and when they left. Just suddenly you weren't hearing anything more about them, the Newark Community Union Project. Now, some of them stayed around, Jessie Allen became a city councilman. Bessie Smith, I think, lived on for a few years, I don't know, and there were some of the other people that they had trained and so on but it pretty much dissolved rather quickly. It wasn't kind of a--

I guess, maybe some of them went on to graduate school or wherever they are, I don't know. Some of them went on to other things, what's his name? Phil Hutchings managed to succeed some, I don't know, I never know how he treated Stokely as head of a [unintelligible 00:46:50].

The others go and I will occasionally hear about one or the other of them. I think there was a Carol Glassman, I think she still shows up now and then. I don't recall who all they were one of them or one of her family ran a big lumber yard out in Union. Most of them were from some distance. They didn't have a long term; it was like other kids might have gone into the Peace Corps or VISTA or something like that.

They **[unintelligible 00:47:21]** put in a couple of years. There was no place for them to go after '67. I don't think they weren't going to be healers; they weren't going to be people to rebuild the community, I don't think. They had a different thing. I don't know how the community felt about them at that point. They were some people.

Curvin: Let me ask you about the disturbance, the '67. Where were you when?

Eldridge: I was home. I got a call from you as I recall, you don't remember that. **[unintelligible 00:47:59]** [crosstalk]. I thought you called me and you said there's some trouble over to Fourth Precinct and you better see what's going on or something like that. Isn't it strange for such a momentous thing?

I don't recall clearly what happened with me at that point, I think we've been sort of dreading this because cities all over the country had been blowing up for several years. There had been a feeling that Newark somehow would not succumb to this. The Newark was just, "We were doing something better and we tucked it up and there were police-community forums and all of this thing and it was one city after another and there's no work." "Wow."

Then when you called me, I think I drove over on then Belmont Avenue, now turned into a boulevard. I think I looked around and didn't see much, didn't seem to be much happening. I did call a paper editor, it was on there that night, I don't recall and said, "You know, I think there's somebody better" "Oh, yeah, we heard about it, we're checking out" or something like that.

There was nothing for me really to do at that point. Then, of course, all hell started breaking loose the next day. Then I wrote a lot of stories, of course, and paper had half a staff frantically out in the streets covering. I called a lot of people and got a lot of ideas and I sent Marge and our kids and some other kids up to the country.

Yes, I did because when I saw the National Guard guys in the jeep on the corner block from my house, I said, "I don't think I want to be here right now."

Curvin: Where are you living in the town?

Eldridge: Oriental place on I saw some unpleasant cemetery between Broadway and McArthur Highway in the Northward. There was no trouble up there. It was a mixed area and there was just nothing that happened.

Curvin: Where you in the **[unintelligible 00:49:59]** [crosstalk]?

Eldridge: Right. **[unintelligible 00:49:58]** trouble, whatever you want to go. What do you call that? My family left town and then waited for the all-clear, I continued writing. I didn't go out into the streets on this believe me. I'm not a brave person for one thing and there were plenty of other people, but part of the result of that was that I think a coverage reflected more some of the official versions because it's hard to report in circumstances like that.

It's like being in a war. Whom can you talk to? You get what the generals or the other people tell you. Of course, there was a lot of focus on the mayor, the governor, the police, the guard, all of that sort of thing, but I did write a couple of pieces about the riot. Particularly I did one piece for the Sunday paper, which was the most important.

Just about how we should have seen it coming and what some of the early warning signs were.

I was beginning to feel some of them because I had been through the years covering all of these different groups. I had never felt particularly conspicuous. Maybe I should have. Maybe I just wasn't that sensitive, but I'd gone to NAACP meetings, I'd gone to a lot of community forums and everything, and I remembered one day in the spring of '67. I was driving up South Orange Avenue and I saw some signs at a storefront so I pulled my car over and got out to look at it, see what it was. Some guy on the street called out and said, "Can't you see that's for Black people?" "Oh, okay."

Curvin: You hadn't felt that kind of--

Eldridge: I felt suddenly I was not welcome. I was standing out and it wasn't an area where I would be safe if you will. I don't know this guy. It was a menacing thing so I got back in the car and drove away. I never had any of the personal stuff. People didn't attack me, but I felt a little more-- Then there were concerns as the tensions rose. Sometimes the news would want to send a Black reporter, and we did have a few to certain things.

There was one time when there was some rally planned up near the Stella Wright houses, I think. They sent a Black reporter who hadn't been covering this stuff at all. He resented it very much, and he made it very clear. Why should they send him into a seemingly dangerous-- It didn't turn out to be anything, but they sent him, and he really did not appreciate it.

He went on to become an editor at Newsweek and a publisher of a newspaper at John Dotson. He made it clear he was not going to be the Black reporter. There were some others who went on some of these assignments, but it just seemed as though it was going to be more difficult for me to play a role, particularly, and then you had the Black Power Conference.

Race was suddenly much more in evidence was there-- Not that it never had not been there, but it just seemed as though suddenly it was the thing, but I had the poverty thing. I still could do that, which was a multiracial activity, but I didn't attempt to cover things like the NAACP and some of that. There wasn't so much to say about them.

Then of course, I did write a lot about the two reports on the riot. The state and the national I know wrote extensively.

Curvin: The state international report.

Eldridge: About the Lily commission and then the Kerner.

Curvin: Kerner commission.

Eldridge: I went down to Washington when that was released. Then the Lily thing, I got reasonably chummy with Sanford Jaffe who did the staff thing on the-- I was pleased that they said so many of the things that they did say. Especially about the Lily commission. I thought some of that was fairly courageous. Whoever was

responsible for it, I don't know, but I think it came as a real wake-up call to a lot of people who expected this was going to be another one of these commissions.

Hem and haw or something, but they came right on this, particularly on the pervasive feeling of corruption [laughs] and some of the other phrases that stay with you. I did some follow-up, but then of course I got involved with the 1970 election campaign.

Curvin: Back to the disturbance [unintelligible 00:54:56] the rebellion as--

Eldridge: Whatever you want to call it. I don't know what you call it. That's a good issue.

Curvin: Right. Do you see positives as well as negatives that came out of the rebellion?

Eldridge: Some school kids asked me this recently [laughs] at a meeting. Even their parents weren't alive then and here they [unintelligible 00:55:20]. There probably were some positives in raising further awareness around the country of some of the problems, but so many people just took it as the last excuse they needed to get to leave Newark or to get away from here and the stores.

I still hear people talking about the loss of the businesses. Where could you get a loaf of bread anymore? All of the whole thing. A lot of the week, as it may have been, a lot of the community fabric was really ripped apart. Some of these merchants may have been exploiting people, but there were neighborhoods that worked in a way. Unfortunately, they were the ones that suffered the most. That wasn't the big downtown corporations that suffered particularly from this, it was the local people.

It's hard to say that it did much good. There was a fellow who had lived in the Hayes homes who took part in this other forum with me, and he talked about how most of the people in Newark weren't really taking part in it. They were staying home. They just wanted to stay out of the line of fire. There were, of course, a lot of young guys mostly who saw an opportunity. Can't blame them in a way, but they put a whole different thing.

Is this a social protest or what? People riot, they don't always riot politely, and once in a while-- To what extent it was motivated by a sense of social injustice, deprivation, or whatever. Whether it's just a chance to grab a air conditioner or something. It's tough to this day. One of the things I did do was go to the Brandeis University to the-- What's the name of-- The center for the study of violence and disorder.

They've done a lot of very good national research. I was able to talk with them and get some of their studies about civil disorders around the country. Some of this stuff didn't get a whole lot of attention, but they did some really significant, I think, analysis. There are patterns. There were very clear patterns. Most of these situations of the gathering, the kindling, the fuel began to accumulate, and then the spark. There's always something usually involving the police that [unintelligible 00:58:20].

Curvin: The police issue was really-

Eldridge: The police issue was it, of course, and then--

Curvin: -[crosstalk] ignition.

Eldridge: Then they run a certain course. They could almost chart it how many days it would go on, then just an exhaustion takes over. You can't sustain that thing for so long, and then there's, of course, they didn't analyze the aftermaths much, but just the whole-- There is a progression. Newark wasn't unique. Maybe we had SDS and other cities had somebody else. I don't know, but each one, we had different issues.

We had Parker Hallahan. I don't know how much the general public got caught up on that. That may have been more the upper level. The other people who could relate to Wilbur Parker. There was the medical school issue, which people like Junias and so on were able to really deal with effectively, but when it came right down it was the cops. A lot of people didn't have problems with the medical school or with Wilbur Parker, but they had a hell a lot of problem with the cops.

This brought it home. Especially right across the street from the station and the cops. There was a bad scene. Then when the guard came in, which made it-- The guard and the state were the worst. Clearly the worst. There was one guy on this panel. I don't know who he was, but wow, he was very impressive. This was at the George Washington Carver School.

He had been in the guard. He talked about what it was like as a 20-year-old kid from the suburbs to come in here, they hand you a gun and tell you to go in and put down the riot and everything, and he didn't shoot, but he saw a lot of shooting. He saw a lot of wanton behavior. Just recklessness because they didn't know what they were doing. They didn't know where they were, and they were surrounded by the enemy. Of course with the state police, it was much more deliberate and intentional.

Shoot up every soul brother store and everything. Of course, everybody walks. Everybody is around [unintelligible 01:00:31] demonstrate no cause for indictment. Nothing. Nobody's responsible. It just happened. The cops had their own grievances and the law. This is their chance to extract their kind of justice after all the years of feeling put upon, abused, or whatever. A lot of things blew up then.

Curvin: Do you accept the conclusion of the prosecutors that there was not enough evidence to indict any of these officers?

Eldridge: Rarely find any cause to indict law enforcement officers for anything. Whether it's Sean Bell or whatever. Whatever it is [laughs]. I don't know what's going to happen there, but historically, it was very rare. It would've been really almost unprecedented if they had. I don't know what evidence they-- I've looked at [unintelligible 01:01:27] book. I can't say I've read it thoroughly, but it certainly shows a pattern.

You wonder how hard they look for evidence and what evidence. Even as this guardsman was talking about it, there were crossfires. In some cases, they were shooting at each other and they didn't know, and there's a whole thing about snipers, nobody's ever found a sniper. Supposedly *Life* magazine found a layer someplace and had pictures of it. I don't know.

Even if they had been able to identify the officers, I'm sure they would've found extenuating, [unintelligible 01:02:07] some sort, or well they thought they were under fire.

They thought that-- It's like, "Which way did the window shatter with the Sean Bell?" There were some cases and some of course, still stand out like Eloise Spellman and the boy who was killed. Was that the one in [unintelligible 01:02:24] far.

Curvin: With the six-pack?

Eldridge: Yes. It's interesting to me. This is a thing I raise with people all the time that all these years afterwards, there still is not a solid agreement on how many people died in the riots. No, not really. Well, most of the time it's 26.

Curvin: Right.

Eldridge: 26 people. That's the figure that you'll see the most. The Kerner commission had a different figure. It was, I think, 24 or something like that. I forget what the state one said, but when you analyze them, there was one death was a heart attack.

Curvin: That was the police officer, right?

Eldridge: Yes. It was a heart attack, he was knocked out. It occurred during the riot. I guess you can say it was a riot. There was one was a drug overdose supposedly. I forget which one that was, but there was one was a drug overdose and one was an auto accident. Somebody was hit by a vehicle. I've questioned sometimes whether those were riot fatalities, but on the other hand, a lot of people suspect that there were other deaths that never got reported, never got noted. Who knows?

It's one of those things you can't agree on. The property damage estimates have varied widely, numbers of injured, all of that kind of thing. We're still studying and still debating it. Went to a forum at the historical society a couple of years ago, and they're still arguing about who did what, when, and how because they had a cop there, a fireman. The firehouse was under siege or something he thought, up on Springfield Avenue.

I don't know. When everything is going crazy, how you then can pick out some people to blame. Some people should have been indicted maybe. Maybe the head of the state police or some other people should have been indicted too. There was this great urge to put everything behind. To get past that. I know the historical society, they told me they ran into that reaction when they prepared their exhibit. "Do we have to bring that up again?"

Some people have told me that other cities have not dwelt on their disorders the way Newark has. They're not marking the anniversaries in Detroit, Washington, Rochester, or wherever and they had pretty good size disorders too. I don't know.

Curvin: Let's move to another--

Eldridge: Please. [laughs]

Curvin: At least at that moment more uplifting-

Eldridge: All right.

Curvin: -topic, which was the election of Gibson. I know that you covered a lot of the-

Eldridge: Yes, I did

Curvin: -campaign. What was that like?

Eldridge: There was a tremendous amount of excitement because Addonizio was at that point, actually on trial for corruption unrelated to any of these civil rights issues, but Addonizio was going down to Trenton every day. During the campaign, as I recall. Excuse me. Gibson had taken a belated shot at it in '66 and had made a surprisingly good showing against Addonizio and Leo Carlin, who was attempting to make a comeback at that point.

I think Gibson actually finished third as I recall, but he was then seen as being in position. During the years from '66 to '70, he had managed to stay in the public eye. He hadn't been too political and of course, I think he was still officially working for the housing authority. [unintelligible 01:06:25] was an engineer or something. Other guys were getting a lot more attention with the civil rights. They were out on the barricades, but Ken had just built up a following.

He seemed to be more acceptable than other people who were more vocal, more visible, and he'd put together an organization. There had been the Black and Puerto Rican convention. I think you were involved with that. Were you not? Yes. [laughs] That was a whole new idea of bringing people together in that way, Addonizio was badly battered.

Curvin: For the record, by the way, I should tell you this story about the Black and Puerto Rican convention. It was not my idea.

Eldridge: Oh, okay.

Curvin: It was Baraka's.

Eldridge: Oh really? If he'd gone out front with it--

Curvin: Ken Gibson had said to me that while he thought it was a good idea, he was concerned if Baraka ran it because he thought it would be too nationalistic. He asked that I serve as the-

Eldridge: Well, he was [crosstalk]--

Curvin: -adviser and facilitator.

Eldridge: The other thing too, I think Ken recognized that he needed some White folks too. I don't think he wanted to be seen just as the Black candidate, although that was unavoidable. The reporters on the paper took turns going around with the

different candidates. I think there were six of them in all. John Cofield, who had an appreciable following and then had some things to say.

I think there was Alex Maturi. There was an Italian, old wine guy upper [unintelligible 01:08:22]. Was [unintelligible 01:08:25] in that one? I don't recall. He may or may not have been, but there were-- There may have been a second Black candidate. I don't recall who that was.

Curvin: Was that Harry Wheeler?

Eldridge: It could have been. He may have pulled out, but [unintelligible 01:08:35] and stayed on it. It was down to the wire. I still remember the-- In fact, I brought along, and I'll show you. I have a picture of Ken and a lot of other people going down Broad Street the day before the runoff election with a lot of celebrities, other members of the ticket, and everything. I'll show that to you. That was in '70.

There had seemed to be an inevitability. A feeling about it, I think that it was going to happen. Addonizio had done his time, [laughs] and he was going to do more time otherwise, but he had done-- Of course, his supporters, if you will. The core of his support, a lot of them had gone since '67, and that the population kept changing. There were fewer people here, and he had really lost virtually all of the Black support he ever had and at one time he had a great deal of it, when he first came in.

Then he had mishandled so many things. His treatment of George Richardson and some of the other things. It just seemed like the moment was here. Ken had stirred someone. There was a guy who isn't exciting really believe stirred so much excitement in the community. He had held a number of roles too which were good for him. He'd been co-chairman as I recall the business and industrial.

Curvin: Industrial coordinator.

Eldridge: He'd gotten to know a lot of the business people. They felt they could live with him so they weren't scared about it. He'd been around. He'd been on the UCC, I think he was one of the officers of the UCC for a while too. It was fascinating to cover because as I say, we all took turns. We did a around robin and I guess I spend a week with Ed Nesio or whoever was in it. We all took turns covering each one. To see the crowds they got and the comments that people made.

Ken, and there were a lot of people around him. Of course, there were always the-- They tried to make a lot of Baraca, that if Ken wins Baraca we'll be running city hall and all this kind of thing. He had a difficult role, a balancing act. Talk about Obama today, how Black should he be? What can he do [unintelligible 01:11:23]. Ken didn't play race as I can recall during the campaign. I don't think it ever-- Certainly not overtly anything came up.

Curvin: Did you see though-- I guess what you're saying you did see though, some of the evidence of the divisions, and that were part of the explosion in '67. That still remain in the city [unintelligible 01:11:46] [crosstalk].

Eldridge: Well, there still was, yes, there was an appreciable White vote and you can almost talk about. Carfield, John Carfield, had a following in those days. He was

a moderate guy and he was well liked and everything. He cut in to Ed Nesio I'm sure because [unintelligible 01:12:02] and all the rest and--

Curvin: He ended up endorsing Gibson [unintelligible 01:12:06] [crosstalk].

Eldridge: Ken, yes, which was really great move on his part. That was terrific, I always said I liked John Carfield. I don't know what else he may have done or not done but he kept reasonably clean. He ran a good department and he took the right stand. He really did and that--

Curvin: He became Gibson's first fire director or--

Eldridge: Possibly, wasn't he fire director anyway?

Curvin: He was fire director before but [unintelligible 01:12:32] [crosstalk].

Eldridge: Yes, he may have stayed or something. Yes, he did something, yes, Gibson kept him on and there was-- I don't know what commitments Ken made or try to make. To get the votes that he did get but it was pretty decisive as I recall. Wait a minute, did he do it without a run off I think? No, wasn't it a run off? Yes, there was a run off.

Curvin: There was a run off.

Eldridge: There was a run off.

Curvin: There was a run off, yes, and that's when Carfield was very decisive. Then the others were not major factors but there were-- I believe there were six in all but it was mainly Gibson, Ed Nesio and Carfield. Of course, you had whatever was left of the people who would have supported Leo Carland. Which was a factor in the work to some extent. What you didn't have much anymore was a Jewish population. They weren't there and they would have probably been mostly for Ken. I would think at that point but they were largely gone.

Italians I guess they probably hung in with Huey pretty much or those who couldn't take him could go with Maturey. Ken, handled it very well and in retrospect, people can say, well, he didn't really try to do much later on. He didn't move aggressively enough for some and I think there was so much concern. We're only three years after '67. There was so much concern of anything that would cause another blow up. It was a real concern. I remember even as the election approach. What happens?

Will there be rioting in the streets again if Ken wins or he loses? Will everybody just go wild? There was some scattered disorder as I recall. I think we had even-- I saw some pictures of photographers being chased away from Ed Nesio's election night thing and everything. There was such an anger.

Curvin: Anger.

Eldridge: Resentment about what was happening so I think Ken felt he had to damp that down afterwards. He didn't really move very aggressively and he did to my surprise and I guess to your disappointment. He kept a lot of the Ed Nesio people

around. I thought there was going to be a whole sale, house cleaning. It didn't happen.

Curvin: Why did he do that? Do you think he really needed to do that? [unintelligible 01:14:58].

Eldridge: I don't know. In retrospect it's hard to say. What if he hadn't?

Curvin: Accommodating to the old guard. I mean in the end to some extent one could argue that that helped to undermine his decision.

Eldridge: Well, a lot of the ideals got [unintelligible 01:15:15]. I mean the idealism got deflated early I think. The vision and to see Herman Limbo. I can tick off a few people. Even Don Melafronti and it pretty much cost me whatever friendship or contacts I had with him at that point. Because I wrote an article about how he was still working for Ken. His wife who was a lovely, lovely person she never forgave me and maybe with good reason. I wrote a story about how Melafronti still--

She said, "Why did you have to do that, you know he needs a job and everything. How could you do that? You've been our friend [unintelligible 01:15:50]," I say, "Well, I'm sorry." It just seemed extraordinary to me, he was the chief advocate if you will. Public advocate for Ed Nesio working for Ken. Woo, yes, I'd like to have a guy like Melafronti, the benefit of his wisdom too. It seemed as though people expected more of a change. It just didn't-- Persistent minority you call it. [chuckles]

Now, there's a question on whether Ken went too far in that direction to try to accommodate everybody. Try to satisfy all the factions and keep the peace even. That was a real concern I think at that time. If he moved too fast or went too far there'd be all kinds of-- I don't know whether they needed these guys or not.

Curvin: Well, he did serve for 16 years.

Eldridge: Yes, he did so obviously he did something.

Curvin: Let's jump to the end point [unintelligible 01:16:51]. What do you think he accomplished in those four terms?

Eldridge: [sighs] Well, I worked for him. Full disclosure here, I was hired in 1972 to work in the public information office in his administration. I stayed there for 10 years and in that role. I had to deal with the press occasionally. He had a press secretary, Bearney Moore, who was part of your movement too. I worked there 10 years and he treated me respectfully and well. On a personal level I still have talked to him from time to time in more recent years. I don't know what he did or didn't do as far as the courts and all of that business is concerned.

That's a whole other scene I don't know but I liked him personally. I had gotten to meet him back in the mid-60s. At first I was not eager even to get involved with anything involving him. Because he seemed-- I was hanging back, I'd go to these meetings I'd always see Ken there. Not particularly-- Didn't have much to say. He didn't grab the mic like a lot of other guys do. I think I may have mentioned it recently when I was first assigned to do an article about him. I was very resistant to that.

Before he even ran for mayor he was named New Yorker of the week. Prudential used to do this every week. They'd put somebody's picture in the window and the editor said, "We want you to do a feature article about Ken Gibson." I said, "You got to be kidding. There's nothing there [unintelligible 01:18:41] just not there. I can't imagine." "Do a personality piece about him." "Personality?" I was fascinated, it really engaged me in some ways. I thought, "This guy is really-- He had really been watching things." He knows what's going on. He's very reasonable and he doesn't seem to be promoting himself much or maybe he was.

Maybe that was the genius of it but you could talk to him. He wasn't putting on a whole public thing really and I really came to have high regard for him. I did work for him for years. I just remember frustrations about his self-effacement almost. There were things-- I know Bearney was always trying to promote Ken or get Ken to say something. Come out and say something, do something, just be out there. Ken was always avoiding that. I just didn't want to-- It was almost like he was publicity shy in some ways.

Curvin: Don't you find it somewhat, I guess interesting is the euphemism in this case for sure. That for 16 years, it's very hard to point to a single thing that you could say is the mark of his legacy.

Eldridge: Yes, that's true. Except that he did start the rebuilding process if you will. Maybe some of it was intangible and psychological and so on, but I think he--

Curvin: You think he got--

Eldridge: I think he helped with the city's image, if you will. That after the Addonizio years, he had a comparatively clean image for what he was doing, but then he got into things that were absurd, like the [unintelligible 01:20:44], the watershed thing--

Curvin: You just say a little bit more about what that--

Eldridge: That was where he had the director of security for the Newark watershed was living in retirement in Florida and on the payroll-- Receiving a paycheck, be receiving a paycheck for the Newark watershed was living in retirement in Florida and on the payroll receiving a paycheck.

Curvin: Be receiving a paycheck.

Eldridge: During that period, there was some sabotage at the watershed, as I recall. One of the mains was that some kids fooled around and opened one of the mains and the water supply was disrupted for some time. Everybody said, "Where's the security?" He's down in whatever beach and we talked.

Curvin: Ken had appointed him.

Eldridge: Ken had appointed him and he didn't apologize and reappointed him and his whole thing, which on a certain human level, you can understand, well he was old and he served his time and he didn't have any place else to go. I took care of the guy in his old age. It was like he was a charity case or something. Wow. The Bon temples did all right during the time. That was a scandal. There were some other

things and there were things around the edges who he dealt with and the alliances and things. I--

Curvin: For the record though, we should point out that he was indicted for that and not convicted.

Eldridge: Not convicted. I don't recall the points that I think would've won the conviction, but he was not-- That's right. He never was convicted. He was indicted subsequently for something after he left the office in something in Irvington. I would be hard put, even though it was partly my job to publicize the administration and all, but this was another example. I was intimately involved in this. One of the things that I was hired to do for the city was to put out a newspaper and we did put out a newspaper for some years.

It was occasional, it was very hard to get done. We used to go around and distribute it every couple of months. I do a lot of articles and at no time did he ever try to prevent my writing or publishing anything. I sometimes went out, I sometimes did some articles that weren't totally favorable or positive. I didn't try to embarrass him or anything, but he wasn't really a control freak in that way.

I felt a certain amount of freedom and I appreciated that. That wasn't anything we made a big noise about or anything, but I knew I lived with it and I didn't have to worry that, "Oh, the mayor is going to--" There may have been some things he didn't like or something, but it never came back to me. Bernie was good about that too. Bernie was frustrated though, because Ken was so camera shy almost and once in a while, he'd open up.

I was sometimes surprised when he would at campaign meetings and everything. He came off some almost as arrogant, but it seems strange to me, he would like, "Well too bad, we're going to show them," kind of thing. He'd talk real tough, but then it wasn't consistent. I know in terms of accomplishments, I think it was more-- Maybe it was atmospheric that the **[unintelligible 01:24:19]** was really down. I think over a period of time, he helped rebuild this. He certainly-- His public appearances. He wasn't nothing sharp, but he could make a good case. He was certainly presentable and some of his appointments were pretty good.

He made some of them were good. Some of them weren't. Rosalyn Bresler, his corporation council, I thought was exemplary. Even some of the other stuff, Al Zach, pros and cons on him, but he was efficient. The business administrators not so good. Elton Hill was just not up for that. Who did he have? Judge Walls, but Judge Walls was never really interested in it. He alienated so many people. Then Milton Bach, who was-- He wasn't told, his business, but that was a long tradition though. The VA was not a star, but I don't think his administration was not an embarrassment but it didn't have a whole lot of momentum and it was on autopilot after a while.

Curvin: Let me take a few minutes to ask you about preservation in Newark, something very **[unintelligible 01:25:44]**

Eldridge: That's me, that's my thing.

Curvin: In a city with so many social issues always on the agenda. I would guess it's a real challenge to get people to understand the importance of preservation, of protecting our architectural and history.

Eldridge: Yes, it is. It certainly is. We've struggled with this from the start. Perhaps we haven't done an adequate job of getting the message out. It's seen sometimes as an almost an elitist interest that to be talking about this when the kids are flunking out to school and people can't find a decent place to live and everything, but it does have something to do with again with image.

A lot of it is intangible. You can see as you go around the city areas where there's been total clearance and maybe with good reason, but a lot of these new developments aren't particularly appealing or attractive, or that have any sense of community. We are just trying to save some things to provide a little context, maybe if you will, of what was and in some cases they've been put to good uses. There's the old metropolitan Baptist church on Prince Street where that's going to be the center of environmental, **[unintelligible 01:27:25]** greater Newark Conservancy.

Which started out with practically nothing. Now they've got this beautiful building, which they're gradually restoring. There are some others, St. Joseph's Plaza, which took on-- An old church took on a different life. They're a counterpoint to all the new stuff that's around them. As the city's economy has improved, there's been more pressure to get some of these things out of the way.

It is tough, it's hard to convince anybody they want a developer and there's some very powerful developers around there. They decide they want this block, that's it. Then you saw it around the arena where they just came in and Willy Nilly, cleared several blocks. Now, a lot of that was junk, little parking lots, always. What have we got now? Now we got more parking lots. It's just tough. It's hard to persuade people. I've talked to people come over from New York to go on tours or lead tours. They're amazed at some of the things that we have in Newark, but they don't-- Newark is outside the pale.

Curvin: What are some of the highlights of our-- Give a few examples.

Eldridge: Oh, of the Glen. We got Sacred Heart Cathedral, which is of course, one of the great cathedrals of the country. One of the fantastic spectacular place visited by the Pope. It's a model on a French cathedral. One of the-- You've got city hall, we can fool about city hall. Otherwise city hall is a grand building. It's a model on the Paris opera house. The grand stairway in there is this pattern from the Paris opera house, a great example of Bo arts--

The **[unintelligible 01:29:11]** county courthouse just recently restored and a huge commitment of public money. With the Lincoln statue in front of parks, Brunswick park one of the first county parks in the United States and still a very beautiful place.

Curvin: **[unintelligible 01:29:29]** creation.

Eldridge: Yes, Homestead did most of the design. At first, the original design with some other people, but then Homestead got into it and designed it. He did **[unintelligible 01:29:39]** Park too. County parks are great. The city Park's another

story. Military Park was messed up for the garage that they put under. We've got world class sculptors, [unintelligible 01:29:55] of America, the Lincoln at the courthouse, [unintelligible 01:29:59] one of the most famous sculptors in American history, they did those work. We've got buildings by great architects, even some of the commercial building, even some of our factories. Murphy varnish, an old factory down below the railroad.

Fortunate it's being saved and it's going to be turned into condos, but it was threatened too and a lot of these things are always on the edge. Right now we're looking at firehouses. Newark has some beautiful old firehouses, and we're trying to see what we can do to save-- Schools. [unintelligible 01:30:30] we were very worried when the school construction authority was actually-- Construction corporation was actually functioning [laughs] because they were going to come in and they had plans to replace 50 schools, I go, "Woah, wooh," and then we were going to lose some really nice schools.

Eberhart Hall at NJIT. There's a long list. A long one. Neighborhoods, we've helped get several neighborhoods on the official historic register. [unintelligible 01:30:56] Forest Hill, Lincoln Park, and the James Street Area and there's a new sense of prime develops in some of those things. They can offer these things. We've got a house for sale in the historic Forest Hill area, and things like that. There are some-- People call us or, "How can I get my church designated as a landmark?" It does improve a whole atmosphere, a character [unintelligible 01:31:24] --

Curvin: Is the structure of preservation those similar to in other cities where there's a local process that--

Eldridge: Yes and Newark has its own landmarks commission, which is not us. I'm the director of the landmarks committee, which is a private non-profit group formed in 1973 and there is a commission appointed by the mayor, which rarely gets much attention. Only attention it got was when Sharp didn't like one of their decisions and he threw most of the people off [laughs] two years ago.

Liz Del Tuffo was the head of it at that point and it has recovered and it is doing fairly well, and Booker just made his very first appointments to it and it's just looking-- They're really doing a job. Good people, but they don't have any staff to speak of and it's hard to make a-- The New York has a huge staff for landmarks and preservation, understandably, and Newark, they get part-time services of a city planner, a woman in the city planning office, she handles the paperwork.

They do have some authority and then there's a state organization. It's part of DEP and they're threatened with cutbacks too. That's just an easy target when you start looking for places to cut, but Newark does have-- I think six neighborhoods have been designated as historic and there are about 65 individual buildings, particularly churches. There was churches because of their congregations.

Every congregation wants a historic church. Churches and some public buildings and statues, parks, a lot of things, and we keep trying to increase the list, but it doesn't provide a lot. A lot of people think two things that are mistaken. One is, they think there's a lot of money if they get their house. People bug us all the time, "Can I

get a landmark?" [unintelligible 01:33:24] Oh yes, well-- Then they think that it just--

Curvin: They think there's a windfall.

Eldridge: Yes, there is and there's none. There is really nothing, especially not for private property. You can-- If you've got a non-profit, you might be able to get some. The other part is they think it's going to protect them against anything and it doesn't necessarily, no, because you can still-- Actually a private owner is completely free really to do what they want pretty much with the landmark.

There's not-- If you own a landmark, it doesn't mean you can't change it, you can't tear it down. There are ways to do it and sometimes you have to get permission, but it can be granted and the Rutgers has gone to the state. Rutgers has acquired various buildings near its campus here and they've gone to the state and gotten their approval to tear down some things and change some things around.

Curvin: [unintelligible 01:34:12] historic buildings?

Eldridge: Yes, within the historic district. They're not individually designated. The museum has gone to the state and we've had some rounds with Mary Sue on this, but fortunately we're on the same page now pretty much, but she's got this huge expansion plan and they're planning to raise, what is it? \$150, \$200 million and in the process, they're going to tear down some things over there. Now they're going to keep the [unintelligible 01:34:38] house, which is the little house near Washington but the one next to it which was originally YWCA, they're going to take everything down except the front wall and move the front wall back.

Save the front, that's it. We've been back and forth with them about that. We're not happy with it, but the museum has done so many other good things, so you have to compromise. You can't live in a vacuum packed world but-- Mary Sue's on our board too, but that's [unintelligible 01:35:06]. Yes, there are things and-- That's the toughest thing, when your friends want to do something too. They want to get rid of a landmark, but we've-- Fortunately, there's a lot more attention to it. Now we do tours and they just try to--

Curvin: Are there any foundations that are interested in--?

Eldridge: There have been a few. There's a Hyde and Watson Foundation, there's-- We haven't gotten [unintelligible 01:35:31], if we ever got anything from them, it's long ago. There was the Edison Fund, which had some historical interest. The state has a historic trust, which will provide money, grants and loans and they put several millions into Newark. They've given money to the Valentine Mansion and to I think the Newark Day Center and then a number of other places. Joe D got some for the courthouse. They will give money for that, but it's drying up. It's tougher. When [unintelligible 01:36:07] is looking around, that's-- [laughs] It's sell the turnpike or cut somebody [laughs] but we keep trying.

It's a small group. We have about 150 members and they pay dues and I'm the only employee and I work part-time. Very part-time and that's it, but we've been around since 1973 and I'm trying to think of who you would know that's involved with us.

Rose Spears, do you know Rose? Yes, she was the president of our organization. Kathy Lennox **[unintelligible 01:36:39]** was involved with the Kruger house, which is--

That's talk about problems, but that's one of the biggest **[unintelligible 01:36:46]**-- What a mess. What a disaster, and we're embarrassed even to talk about that one, but there's not-- It's taken millions, it'll take millions more. Donald Tucker used to be on a war path all the time about that, "How much more you going to spend on this place?" Oh yes and we--

Curvin: **[unintelligible 01:37:04]** this has been great. I'm going to--

Eldridge: Move on.

Curvin: Call it a cut right now.

Eldridge: Yes, I know. Yes.

Curvin: But I think that we may want to get back to you again--

Eldridge: Tell me, yes.

Curvin: -and do another session on some other more historical things.

Eldridge: I'd love to.

Curvin: **[unintelligible 01:37:21]** Great. Thank you so much.

[01:37:24] [END OF AUDIO]